

DATE: November 10, 1976

To : File

FROM : Joshua Lederberg

SUBJECT: E.L. Tatum: interview with David Regnery by telephone.

David Regnery was an undergraduate in 38-39 seeking special problem work and in that sense was a close onlooker at the critical stages of the evolution of Neurospora. I urged him several times and very strongly to dictate a memoir about that period: what it was like working in the catacombs, what the working relationships were and so forth, and I hope he will be responding.

He mentioned one anecdote: that when Regnery asked Tatum to suggest some readings in German, Ed gave him a paper by Butenandt (it turns out the one in Naturwissenschaften) and just let Regnery read it himself and discover for himself what it was all about. Dave feels that having been scooped here was indeed a very great disappointment after all the very hard work that he and Hagenschmidt had been doing to isolate the hormone: that Butenandt by his insight into pathways was able to pull a bottle off the shelf and identify the same substance, the easy way. This may have been a prototypic lesson on how to solve biochemical problems by pathway analysis. It was suggested as one of the precipitating factors about getting out of Drosophila.

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Regnery feels that at that time yeast was a major contender as an alternative. There were problems about the rigor of its genetic mechanisms. The turning point again was a course that Ed gave (volunteered since he was a research associate) in 38 on comparative biochemistry! Ed worked very hard and diligently in preparing the course (undoubtedly how he discovered Fries). "He and Beadle would come back from each lecture talking over the material in detail. This jibes directly with Beadle's account.

In 1941, Regnery recalls big "blasts" irradiating Neurospora in May and then in June and the discouragement that was then only finally rewarded with #299. (Exactly what did they expect as the likelihood of the frequency of the kind of mutants they were looking for?)

One I pushed him on the point, he did indeed say that he thought a schism did gradually develop. By about 1942-43 there was a major space rearrangement. As this was the time that Ed now had his own assistant professorship, this may also have been a hallmark of independence. The department was running out of space and undoubtedly there were some conflicts about that. As they did become separated, students had the feeling that they had to choose between them as their sponsors. Taine Bell was mentioned as the name of a person likely to have been close into many of the developments at this level and should be consulted.

Frank Hungate and Adrian Srb were also recommended as people in the know.

When I asked about the motives for Tatum's leaving Stanford in 1944, Regnery chuckled but said I guess he felt he needed to fly by himself. I asked him if he had some kind of nudge, and he agreed that probably Beadle did do that and

that, of course, this was better for both of them. He did not know whether there was a more explicit confrontation with respect to space or the latent possibility of a promotion, but certainly that would have been some years off even under the most optimistic circumstances.